

Transcript: Rep. Mike Pence on 'FNS'

Published August 03, 2009

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The following is a rush transcript of the August 2, 2009, edition of "FOX News Sunday With Chris Wallace." This copy may not be in its final form and may be updated.

CHRIS WALLACE, HOST: "Right Now," our ongoing look at the future of the GOP, continues now with Indiana Congressman Mike Pence, chairman of the GOP Conference. He's the number three Republican in the House.

And, Congressman, welcome back to "FOX News Sunday."

REP. MIKE PENCE, R-IND.: Thank you.

WALLACE: Let's start with the economy and some recent signs of progress. Let's put them up on the screen.

The economy was down only 1 percent last quarter, after a 6.4 percent drop the prior three months. New home sales soared 11 percent in June. And the stock market had its best month in seven years.

Congressman, isn't the recession leveling off? And doesn't President Obama deserve some credit?

PENCE: Well, let me say I hope the recession is leveling off. Slowing the rate of descent is encouraging, I'm sure, to millions of Americans. But I really believe that it's in spite of the prescriptions of Washington, D.C., Chris.

I mean, this so-called stimulus bill that — you know, that was passed last February — we've lost 2 million jobs since the stimulus bill was passed.

And I think what we're seeing in the economy now is the inherent resilience of the American economy and the American people.

And while those — while those numbers are encouraging, what we ought to be doing is pursuing the kind of broad-based prescription for recovery and stimulating this economy that has always worked, which is fiscal discipline in Washington, D.C. and tax relief for working families, small businesses and family farms.

WALLACE: All right. Let's look at the stimulus bill which you voted against. The Democratic National Committee, as I'm sure you know, is running a radio ad in Indiana in which they note that the stimulus package is funding public works projects across the state and in your home district. Let's listen.

(BEGIN AUDIO CLIP)

NARRATOR: These projects are creating and saving jobs and boosting our economy. So when you see that sign that says this project funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, you can say, "No, thanks," to Mike Pence.

(END AUDIO CLIP)

WALLACE: Congressman, "No, thanks," to Mike Pence?"

PENCE: Well, let me say Indiana's lost 20,000 jobs since the so-called stimulus bill was passed.

WALLACE: But nobody — excuse me. Nobody said that the stimulus bill was going to stop the recession.

PENCE: Well, now, hold on a second. The Democrats in Congress and the administration said that we were going to have to borrow nearly a trillion dollars from future generations and spend it on this — this long laundry list of liberal spending priorities that we called stimulus and that unless we did that, unemployment would reach 8 percent nationally.

It's 9.5 percent nationally today. In my beloved Indiana, it's 10.7 percent and still rising, Chris. I mean, the reality is that, you know, borrowing a trillion dollars from future generations of Americans and spreading it around the economy is going to have some catalytic effect in the economy in the short term, but again, it's no substitute for fiscal discipline in Washington, D.C. and tax relief across the board for working families and small businesses.

WALLACE: But I want to ask you about another report, and we're going to put it up on the screen. More than 2,400 people are now at work on federal-stimulus-funded roadway projects in Indiana.

"What's clear is that the stimulus projects have boosted an industry otherwise floundering in Indiana." And that is not from the DNC. That's from the Evansville, Indiana Courier & Press.

PENCE: Right. That's right. I saw that report as well. To be honest with you, though, I've talked to officials with the Indiana Department of Transportation, and no one's really sure where that number came from, Chris.

But, look. Republicans were always prepared earlier this year to support funding for roads and bridges and infrastructure. It's unfortunate that that was such an infinitesimally small portion of the stimulus bill that was passed by the Congress earlier this year.

If you check the Indianapolis Star this morning you'll see a couple of stories about the stimulus. One is that four out of 10 major projects in the stimulus for Indiana had been allotted to companies outside the state of Indiana.

And this weatherization funding — Governor Daniels has expressed some frustration in newspapers this morning that Indiana's gotten no funding from — they've been...

WALLACE: Yeah, but I don't understand.

PENCE: ... conditionally approved for that. All of this...

WALLACE: First you're saying the stimulus is bad. Now you're saying you're just not getting your fair share of it.

PENCE: Well, what I'm saying is that this piecemeal approach — government handouts through a government bureaucracy — is no substitute for broad-based tax relief and fiscal discipline in Washington, D.C.

Chris, the quickest way to get money into this economy is not to take it in the first place. And Republicans fought for broad-based tax relief.

We fought for fiscal discipline all year long, opposing the stimulus, opposing runaway spending in the budget, opposing the national energy tax and cap and trade and this government takeover of health care with its higher taxes, and we're going to continue to make that fight.

WALLACE: Let me ask you about one last element in the stimulus package. You voted on Friday against the "cash for clunkers" program...

PENCE: Right.

WALLACE: ... which a lot of people are saying is a big success — 250,000 new cars bought in just one week alone.

Even if you're right that a lot of the stimulus money wasn't stimulative and ended up just being Democratic social spending, isn't the clunkers program successful?

PENCE: Well, look. I think the "cash for clunker" program is a — is a good deal for car buyers, but it's a bad deal for taxpayers.

And again, it's no substitute for sound economic policy that will encourage across-the-board growth. I don't blame any Hoosier or any American for taking advantage of \$4,500 in free federal money to go and buy a new car.

But is that really what it's going to take to get this economy moving again? You know, I think, quite frankly, that most Americans know that the way to get this economy back on its feet is for us to put our fiscal house in order here in Washington, D.C. and to give working families and small businesses more of their money to spend.

WALLACE: Where do you think your party is right now in the battle for public opinion versus President Obama and the Democrats?

PENCE: Well, I think Republicans are starting to earn back the confidence of the American people that we squandered, really, in the last 10 years. I mean, look, let's be honest. We didn't just lose our majorities in 2006. We lost our way. I mean, the American people saw a Republican Party that walked away from its commitment to fiscal discipline, limited government and reform, and the American people walked away from us.

We saw — we saw in the last Republican administration, you know, increase at the federal Department of Education, the Medicare prescription drug entitlement, and an administration that ended up taking \$700 billion in bad decisions on Wall Street and transferring those to Main Street, that on top of a doubling of the national debt.

But since the last election, Republicans on Capitol Hill are returning to their commitment to fiscal discipline, limited government and reform, and the defense of traditional values.

And I believe we're — we're beginning to get a second look from the American people, and they're beginning to see that Republicans are returning to the principles that minted our majority in 1980 and again in 1994.

WALLACE: But, Congressman, while new polls show that support for the president, and especially for his health care reform plan, are slipping, they also seem to indicate that the voters are not at this point ready to give a second look to Republicans.

I want you to take a look at the latest poll. When asked their opinion of congressional Republicans, "not favorable" won by more than 2-1. When asked about Democrats, the margin, as you can see, was five points-plus favorable. That's not exactly a vote of confidence for the GOP.

PENCE: No, it's not, and — but let me say I don't think the debate in this country is about President Obama or about Democrats or Republicans. I think it's about who we are as a nation.

I think it's about — about what we believe is the proper role of government in our lives and the proper responsibility of individuals. You know, this whole business — you know I opposed those bailouts when they started last fall, and I've been opposing them all the way through last Friday's vote.

You know, the American people know we can't borrow and spend and bail our way back to a growing economy. And they also know that the freedom to succeed includes the freedom to fail.

But here we have this clash of ideas that's taking place. Republicans for a while were on the wrong side of that argument. We've gotten back on the side of fiscal responsibility, personal responsibility, limited government.

And I think as we continue to fight consistently on Capitol Hill and take our message to the American people, the American people are going to come back to us.

WALLACE: How important do you think this August recess is in shaping public opinion over health care reform?**PENCE:** Well, I think it's -
- I think it's enormously important, but I bristle at the suggestion that anyone from Washington will shape public opinion of the...

WALLACE: No, I'm actually talking...

PENCE: ... government takeover of health care.

WALLACE: ... more about the role that the — that the voters...

PENCE: Oh, OK. All right.

WALLACE: ... are going to play as members go back to their home districts.

PENCE: Yeah. I always tell — I always will remind folks here on Capitol Hill that there's somebody who sits at the table that usually gets left out of conversations in Washington, and that is the American people.

I think the American people have a very strong idea that we ought to lower the cost of health insurance for families and businesses, that we ought to lower the cost of health care.

But the American people oppose a government takeover of health insurance, and they know if the Democrats and the administration get their way and create a new government-run plan, tens of millions of Americans will lose their health insurance.

My bet is, Chris, that as Republicans and Democrats fan out across this country in the next month, they're going to hear from the American people that they want modest and responsible health care reform that lowers the cost of insurance and health care, but they don't want a government takeover. And hopefully, that will set the stage for some modest but responsible reforms in a bipartisan way this fall.

WALLACE: One last question I want to get into with you. Nine days ago you headlined a GOP picnic — and there's a picture of it — in Iowa, which, of course, just happens to hold the first presidential contest in 2012.

I know you say that you were there just to help out a friend who's a member of Congress, but you are not flatly ruling out a run for president in 2012.

PENCE: I have no plans to run for president, Chris. I'll tell you what. My focus right now is on serving the people of Indiana in Washington and doing everything in my power, whether it was in Iowa — I was in North Carolina. I've been in Florida, California, Ohio and Kentucky.

I'm going to do everything in my power to elect as many conservatives to Congress in the year...

WALLACE: But you're not flatly ruling it out.

PENCE: ... 2010 as possible. Look, the focus right now for the American people is on the role of government in our lives.

I'll leave you with one thought. There was a guy in Newcastle, Indiana who came up to me after the second bailout vote. He had lost his job the day before and he walked up to me. He said, "Congressman," he said, "I lost my job yesterday, but I wanted to thank you for voting against that bailout, because I can get another job, but I can't get another country."

I mean, I really believe millions of Americans are not interested in the politics of 2012. They're not interested in who's up and who's down in the polls. They want to see us in Washington, D.C. defend the fundamental freedoms — free market economics, the values — that make this nation great. And that's where our focus is going to be.

WALLACE: Congressman Pence, we're going to have to leave it there. I want to thank you so much for coming in today. And please come back, sir.

PENCE: Thank you, Chris.

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